

After 21 years in a freezer, baby boy will be buried against his parents' wishes

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The body of a baby boy that has been lying in a mortuary freezer for 21 years is to be buried against his parents' wishes after a council used new powers to formalise his death.

Christopher Blum died aged 4 months after receiving a standard vaccination in hospital in June 1987.

His parents are convinced that he died as a result of a blood infection caused by a contaminated vaccine. However, postmortem examinations gave the cause as sudden infant death syndrome, also known as cot death.

Steven Blum, the boy's father, has refused repeatedly to sign his son's death certificate if it gives the cause as cot death, meaning that Christopher could not be buried.

Last week Enfield Council, North London, used new powers to register Christopher's death without giving a cause. It has told Mr Blum that he has until August 18 to say where he wants Christopher buried and the wording of a headstone, or the council will make the funeral arrangements itself.

Mr Blum, 61, is preparing to challenge the council's decision in the High Court in a final attempt to halt the burial. Christopher has spent the past 21 years in a freezer drawer marked "Baby Blum: Deceased". His tiny frame is kept at minus 8C (17.6F) at a weekly cost of £15.

Christopher's mother, Mary, had taken him to the North Middlesex Hospital to be inoculated against whooping cough, polio and tetanus. He was sick immediately afterwards and that evening was found dead in his cot at the family home in Edmonton, North London.

Mr Blum said that postmortem blood tests showed the baby had a blood infection that he believes may been caused by a contaminated vaccine. He claims that the authorities had insisted that the infection got into the blood sample accidentally in the laboratory. Mr Blum also says that two back-up samples have gone missing and Christopher's organs cannot be found. "When people hear that Christopher is unburied they think I am some sort of nutter, a crazy person who just can't let go," Mr Blum said. "Although my marriage broke up my wife still supports me as do my [three surviving] children.

"The key point about my son's death is that you cannot have cot death if a cause of death is found. Cot death is an unexplained death meaning nothing untoward can be found for a healthy baby suddenly and unexpectedly dying. In Christopher's case there was a cause. And that's why I refuse to accept he was a victim of cot death."

Mr Blum is billed regularly for Christopher's stay in the mortuary at North Middlesex Hospital. "Do they really think I want Christopher lying there officially undead?" Mr Blum said.

Enfield Council said that the Registrar General had allowed the authority to register the death this month under new laws that did not require a cause to be given.

"We have kept Mr Blum informed and have asked for his views all along," a council spokeswoman said. "We have now asked him what arrangements he would like to make regarding his son's funeral and the wording of the headstone by August 18."

The longest unresolved case of this kind is that of Helen Smith, a nurse who was 23 when she fell from a balcony in Saudi Arabia in 1979. She remains in a mortuary in Leeds. Her father, Ron, who is 81, refuses to have her buried until it is accepted that she was murdered. Mr Smith said that the city council in Leeds had agreed that his daughter would remain in the mortuary while the circumstances of her death were being contested.

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